ExceleRate Subcommittee, Minutes of August 2019 meeting

Thursday, August 15, 2019, 10:30 – 12:30
National-Louis University's Lisle campus, 850 Warrenville Rd., Lisle. and by conference phone

<u>Present</u>
Amanda Heinz, Ann Hentschel, Ashley Nazarak, Barb Volpe, Beth Knight, Carie Bires, Cindy Wall, Deborah Chalmers, Donna Emmons, Elysia Aufmuth, Emily Ropars, Felichia Crawford, Gail Nelson, Iveree Brown, Marie Masterson, Mark Koski, Marsha Hawley, Mike Abel, Pam Wicking, Tamara Sanders-Carter, Teri Talan, Theresa Hawley, Toni Porter

1. **Welcome and introductions**

2. **Minutes and follow-up from previous meeting**
   Donna Emmons moved to approve the minutes of the July 18 meeting. Emily Ropars seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

3. **Workgroup reports and discussion**
   Each of the 3 workgroups reported on its first meeting.

   (a) *Staffing and materials*. Theresa Hawley reported that the workgroup sketched out 4 or 5 levels. Programs at each level would be funded to maintain specific staffing and compensation levels (to be defined) needed to support a program similar to the following:
      - Level 4 – PFA-E and/or Head Start with comprehensive services; Awards of Excellence practices for teaching & learning and infant toddler
      - Level 3 – PFA/PI
      - Level 2.5? – Programs improve via small steps and over time, so more than one "Level 2" might be required to reflect small steps. Subcommittee discussion suggested that financial incentives for staff training have been effective and could be integrated at these levels with credential attainment goals and with program improvement work areas. Baseline program assessments like PAS, ERS and CLASS could inform programs' choice of improvement areas.
      - Level 2 – Possible pilot for helping Licensed-level programs move up. Address DCFS licensing violations.
      - Level 1 – DCFS licensing requirements. Other supports to help prepare for movement to Level 2?

      In discussion, the Subcommittee changed the name of this workgroup to *Staffing patterns, qualifications and compensation.*

   (b) *Process quality/Professional practices*. Ashley Nazarak reported that the workgroup discussed its charge in relation to the charge of the CQI standards and structure workgroup. The Subcommittee wants to embed CQI into professional practices, and it seemed that the 2 workgroups should discuss that jointly. They talked with Mike Abel about the CQI workgroup's charge, and Mike clarified that the CQI group was planning to discuss how to measure any or all of the 8 CQI components previously developed. The Subcommittee decided to review workgroup charges after hearing the report of the CQI workgroup.

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Ashley reported further that the workgroup proposed adding Continuous Quality Improvement as a new domain in the ExceleRate standards. The current domains include Teaching & Learning, Family & Community Engagement, and Leadership & Management. (Staff Qualifications & Continuing Education are currently a domain as well, but this is being handled by the Staffing workgroup.) Ashley's workgroup felt that eventually CQI might be incorporated within each of the other domains, but since we want programs to learn what it is – regardless of the content or practice being improved – it makes sense to break it out separately at this point. Going forward, the workgroup will break down CQI practices by level (Licensed through Gold), making sure that relevant Awards of Excellence practices are included throughout and relating each level to the structural/staffing supports that are needed.

Additional workgroup recommendations (and next steps) are to integrate inclusion and culturally/linguistically appropriate practices throughout rather than include as separate areas, and to review to ensure that implicit bias and racial equity practices are threaded throughout.

(c) *CQI standards & structure*. Mike Abel reported that the workgroup charge was to consider the 8 components of CQI and choose a few that could serve as key indicators associated with good CQI-related practices, and to determine how they could be measured or verified. The workgroup distinguished between (1) measuring improvement in PAS, ERS and CLASS scores, which can be done, and (2) measuring implementation of the 8 components. Workgroup members were not sure that valid and reliable instruments exist for measuring CQI processes (the 8 components), and they will look further. The PAS includes measures related to some of the components, and perhaps those measures could be used.

Mike also asked whether the system should focus quality assessment resources at the beginning of a program's improvement planning to generate *baseline* data, especially for programs at the Licensed or Bronze levels [or what an earlier report called Levels 1, 2 and 2.5], rather than to verify ratings for higher-quality programs at the end of the process.

Having heard all 3 reports, the Subcommittee returned to the question of workgroup charges. The group decided to charge the Process Quality/Professional Practices workgroup with standards (excluding staffing patterns, qualifications and compensation), and charge the CQI workgroup with measurement of standards implementation. The new names for the workgroups are:
  (a) *Staffing patterns, qualifications and compensation*
  (b) *Professional practice and CQI standards*
  (c) *CQI measures and verification*

The Subcommittee also called for better graphic representation of the revised ExceleRate model we are developing. Members pointed to the inadequacy of our current graphic in communicating our new vision. Tom Layman suggested that we might think about an upward spiral that touches each of the domains but at increasingly higher levels. Emily Ropars suggested that it might be more like a double helix because the staffing/funding portion is somewhat different from the professional practices portion. Emily pointed out that we are not experts in representing mental maps and we should find an expert who can help us. The group agreed and

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pointed out that if we are not clear on the model among ourselves, we will not communicate it effectively.

Discussion then moved to messaging our current work in more general terms. We agreed that our message should be that "we heard you" and we are modifying the standards, not creating something new. We have reviewed ExceleRate after its first 5 years of operation. [We might add that we are addressing staffing-related obstacles and adding flexibility for programs to identify their own priorities and demonstrate Continuous Quality Improvement in those areas.]

4. **Other big questions from our list**
   Our previous list of other big questions included:

   - Should programs be able to choose improvement topic areas? Would there be something like "badges" (or Awards of Excellence) in specific areas?

   - Use of program assessment scores (ERS, CLASS, PAS) in ratings: Cut scores? Improved scores? Neither?

   - Piloting: How might a pilot work? Or Implementation scale-up: How could that happen? What would be the critical path items for implementation timing?

   - Family child care. What are the foundational items and their costs? Would FCC standards essentially map to the proposed framework? Would networks have a role in CQI?

   - How can the framework incentivize the lowest-quality programs to get on the improvement ladder?

   Most of these questions were addressed (but not resolved) in the workgroup reports, and discussions will continue. We added an additional big question:

   - How can we describe and cost out the publicly funded technical assistance and professional learning supports that will be needed to advance this model? (We said we like to think of it all as Professional Learning and move away from the use of the term "training", which implies that the recipient has only a passive, non-professional role.)

5. **Communications or documents needed for Early Learning Council, Finance Commission and others**
   The Subcommittee discussed the need for a better graphic representation of this model, as described above.

6. **Next meeting Thursday, September 19,** 10:30 – 12:30
   NLU Chicago campus